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Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups

This classification was developed for use in the collection, storage and dissemination of all Australian statistical data classified by religion

Reference period: 2016

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Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) and Religious Affiliation Standard (RAS) - Major Review

In 2022, the ABS began a major review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) and the associated Religious Affiliation standard (RAS; How we ask the religion question in the Census of Population and Housing). The aim of the review is to update the ASCRG to better reflect the modern Australian community. Changes to RAS will be considered as part of the [2026 Census Topic Consultation](#)

(<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-review>) process which is a separate process to the Religion Review.

Why does the ASCRG need to be updated?

While the current version of the ASCRG had some minor updates in 2016, it largely reflects the original 1996 version based on the social environment in Australia at that time. The Australian community has changed considerably over this time and the ASCRG needs to be reviewed to reflect this. ABS has also received feedback from individuals and organisations identifying areas that need review. Data from the 2021 Census will further inform the review.

Next steps

The second round of public consultation on the ASCRG review is scheduled to commence in September 2023. At this time, the ABS will invite feedback through the ABS Consultation Hub, regarding the proposed changes to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG).

The first round of public consultation occurred in August 2022 and sought feedback on what should be included in the review. The outcome of this consultation is provided in the following link: [2022 Review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups \(ASCRG\) and the Religious Affiliation Standard \(RAS\) - Australian Bureau of Statistics - Citizen Space \(abs.gov.au\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/standards-and-classifications/2022-australian-standard-classification-of-religio/) (<https://consult.abs.gov.au/standards-and-classifications/2022-australian-standard-classification-of-religio/>).

More information on the current consultation will be available at [ABS Consultation hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/) in the coming weeks, including information about how to participate in the review process. It is expected that ABS will publish the revised ASCRG in March 2024.

If you would like more information, please email the ABS at standards@abs.gov.au (<mailto:standards@abs.gov.au>).

Overview

About the classification

Religious affiliation provides a useful indicator of aspects of the cultural diversity of Australia's society. The first edition of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) was published in 1996 and the second edition was published in 2005. The need for periodic reviews to reflect changes in the religious profile of Australia was

foreshadowed when the ASCRG was first released. A minor review was conducted in 2011 with minimal change.

A review of the ASCRG in 2016 resulted in a number of changes at the broad, narrow and religious group levels of the classification. These changes are shown in the 'what has changed' page. The 2016 classification and correspondence tables are available in Excel from the Data downloads section.

Classification uses

The ASCRG is for use in collecting, aggregating and disseminating data relating to the religious affiliation of the Australian population. It is used to classify religious affiliation data from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) surveys and the Census of Population and Housing. Its use is also recommended in administrative data collections where there is a need to collect religious affiliation.

Data classified by religion can be used for policy and planning purposes related to the location and development of educational facilities and church buildings, aged persons' care facilities and services, and the provision of other social services by religious organisations. It may also be used in sociological research, and in assigning chaplains and other care providers to hospitals, prisons, armed services, universities, and other institutions, and to determine the allocation of time to community groups on public radio and in other media.

First edition of the ASCRG 1996

The first edition of the ASCRG was developed by the ABS after extensive research of Australian and overseas literature, and analysis of existing data relating to the religious profile of Australia (primarily data from the 1991 Census of Population and Housing). This was supported by information and advice from academics and religious experts, consultation with community and religious groups interested in this topic and the application of statistical principles and techniques relating to statistical classification.

In the classification, religious groups are arranged into progressively broader categories on the basis of similarity in terms of religious beliefs, religious practices and the cultural heritage of adherents. This results in those religious groups which are closely related in terms of their intrinsic characteristics being closely aligned in the structure of the classification. Therefore, people with similar religious beliefs are grouped together to produce a classification that is useful for both social analysis and planning purposes.

Analysis of responses to previous ABS Censuses of Population and Housing identified religious groups with large numbers of affiliated persons, such as Christian denominations, which were then extensively identified in the classification. Those religions with a small

number of affiliated persons were not separately identified in the classification structure but were included in appropriate residual categories.

The identification of individual religions or denominations in the classification, and the way in which they are grouped, does not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the ABS concerning the relative merit or importance of particular religions or the people who practice them.

Second edition of the ASCRG 2005

The second edition (2005 revision) of the classification included changes to the structure of the classification and the renaming of some religious groups. At the four-digit level, the structure was expanded from 107 religious groups to 115. The number of narrow groups reduced from 33 to 32. No changes were made at the broad group level.

The 2011 minor review of the classification resulted in minimal change. There was no change to the number of religious groups, narrow groups or broad groups.

Third edition of the ASCRG 2016

The third edition of the classification, published in 2016, included changes to the structure of the classification and the renaming of some religious groups. At the four-digit level, the structure was expanded from 115 to 131 religious groups. The number of narrow groups increased from 32 to 34. An expansion of broad group 7 has enabled the ABS to reduce the reliance on supplementary codes to produce meaningful data from responses which would not code to any of the major world religions. Seven supplementary codes have been made redundant.

Definition of religion

A precise definition of the concept of religion, or of what generally constitutes a 'religion', is difficult, because of the intangible and wide-ranging nature of the topic.

Generally, a religion is regarded as a set of beliefs and practices, usually involving acknowledgment of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense.

This method of defining religion in terms of a mixture of beliefs, practices, and a supernatural being giving form and meaning to existence, was used by the High Court of Australia in 1983. The High Court held that 'the beliefs, practices and observances of the Church of the New Faith (Scientology) were a religion in Victoria'.

As part of the ruling, it was stated that:

For the purposes of the law, the criteria of religion are twofold: first, belief in a Supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief, though canons of conduct which offend against the ordinary laws are outside the area of any immunity, privilege or right conferred on the grounds of religion.

The above definition is useful in describing the nature of all the entities included in the classification, apart from the renamed broad group 7 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation'.

For example:

- Buddhism is universally accepted as a religion because, although it does not acknowledge a personal God, it contains elements of belief in supernatural principles as well as canons of conduct
- Confucianism is regarded as a religion, even though it involves no overt belief in the supernatural, because it provides a moral code for its adherents and because it contains elements of belief in supernatural principles.

Not all philosophies which involve beliefs about the nature of life or codes of behaviour are accepted as religions. For example:

- Marxism, although regarded as a religion by some, is more generally regarded as a political philosophy based on a coherent set of beliefs, without any supernatural or spiritual component, and is therefore excluded from the classification.

The extent of opinion as to what constitutes a religion, practical considerations, and generally held notions about the nature of philosophies, organisations and institutions, all play a role in defining religion or identifying the concepts that underpin religion. These elements complement the more stringent notions of belief, accepted and wide-spread practices and canons of conduct, and a supernatural being or principle, included in the definition of religion.

Scope of the classification

The scope of the classification is all religions and subsets of religions in the world as defined above. In practice, only those religious groups that have a significant number of affiliated persons in Australia are separately identified in the classification structure. However, all other religions are covered and are included in the most appropriate residual category (Miscellaneous, Other, or Not elsewhere classified categories) of the classification. The code structure of the classification also allows the identification of religious groups not separately identified, if such a need arises.

'Secular beliefs and other spiritual beliefs and no religious affiliation' broad group

The classification structure also includes a broad group that covers 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation' which could be considered to be inconsistent with the basis of the classification as described above and outside the scope of the religion topic. This broad group has been included for practical reasons and to make the classification more useful. Many statistical and administrative applications need to accommodate the whole range of responses to a question on religion, including personal spiritual beliefs, secular beliefs and the response 'No Religion'.

About the review

Purpose of the review

The need for periodic reviews of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) to reflect changes in the religious profile of the Australian population, was foreshadowed when ASCRG was first released.

Analysis of 2011 Census of Population and Housing Religious Affiliation data indicated the need for a review of ASCRG:

- to ensure the classification is up-to-date for use in the 2016 Census
- to reflect changes to the coverage of Australian religious and spiritual beliefs
- to make some changes to coding assignment in the classification
- to improve the coding index used to code responses to the religious affiliation question.

A review of ASCRG was undertaken in 2016 to address these issues. It was deemed necessary to expand broad group seven of the classification to reduce the reliance on supplementary codes which have in the past been used to collect data reflecting spiritual beliefs which do not fit neatly into the six major groups used to list the recognised World religions.

An assessment of the conceptual model underpinning the classification was out of scope of this review.

How it was done

Statistical analysis

Analysis of responses to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing Religious Affiliation question was conducted to identify:

- new religious groups
- religious groups whose number of affiliated persons had significantly increased

- religious groups whose number of affiliated persons had significantly declined
- other spiritual beliefs and practices which would be better placed in an expanded broad group seven rather than relying on supplementary codes.

External research

Extensive research was conducted to:

- confirm the appropriate terminology to be used for categories in the classification
- supplement the Census of Population and Housing data and stakeholder comments
- assess the accuracy of coding of religious groups.

Stakeholder consultation

Consultation was undertaken with a range of users and stakeholders, and experts in the field. Although, stakeholders were generally satisfied with the classification some matters were identified for update and further analysis.

The classification was updated where data, external research and stakeholder analysis indicated necessary or appropriate changes were needed.

What has changed

Summary of changes

The 2016 review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) has resulted in changes made at the broad, narrow and religious group levels of the classification.

Changes at broad group level

The purpose of broad group 7 has been expanded and subsequently the broad group name has been changed from 'No Religion' to 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation'.

Changes at narrow group level

The narrow group for Miscellaneous Religions had originally been assigned a three-digit code (699) which enabled a maximum of eight religious groups to be separately identified in this narrow group of the classification. This had reached capacity, but new religions which meet the criteria of this narrow group have been identified. The 2016 review has changed the narrow group coding to two-digits enabling more religious groups to be added to the narrow group.

Narrow groups included in the expanded broad group 7 have been allocated two-digit codes.

Changes at religious group level

There have been a number of changes at the religious group level, including the addition of several new religious groups and other beliefs as a result of the expansion of broad group 7. Several group name changes have been identified and a small number of groups have been deleted from the classification.

Religious groups added to the classification

The review added 20 new religious groups to the classification.

One new religious group to narrow group 207 Catholic:

- Syro Malabar Catholic (code 2076)

Seven new religious groups to narrow group 24 Pentecostal:

- Acts 2 Alliance (code 2416)
- Christian Church in Australia (code 2417)
- Pentecostal City Life Church (code 2418)
- Revival Fellowship (code 2421)
- Victory Life Centre (code 2422)
- Victory Worship Centre (code 2423)
- Worship Centre Network (code 2424)

Three new religious groups to narrow group 28 Other Protestant:

- Christian Community Churches of Australia (code 2811)
- Methodist, so described (code 2812)
- United Methodist Church (code 2813)

Two new religious groups to narrow group 69 Miscellaneous Religions:

- Mandaean (code 6901)
- Yezidi (code 6902)

The expansion of broad group 7 has enabled the inclusion of the following groups previously coded to supplementary codes:

- Multi Faith (code 7301)
- New Age (code 7302)

- Own Spiritual Beliefs (code 7303)
- Theism (code 7304)

Three 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) codes have been added to the classification:

- Anglican, nec (code 2019)
- Secular Beliefs, nec (code 7299)
- Other Spiritual Beliefs, nec (code 7399)

Religious groups which have been renamed or re-described

Several religious group names have been changed to align with updated group names identified through research. The majority of name changes have been for Pentecostal groups in narrow group 24. In most cases, to enable easier identification of these groups, the former names have been included in brackets:

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (code 2151)
- Australian Christian Churches (Assemblies of God) (code 2402)
- Bethesda Ministries International (Bethesda Churches) (code 2403)
- C3 Church Global (Christian City Church) (code 2404)
- International Network of Churches (Christian Outreach Centre) (code 2406)
- CRC International (Christian Revival Crusade) (code 2407)
- Full Gospel Church of Australia (Full Gospel Church) (code 2412)
- Grace Communion International (Worldwide Church of God) (code 2915)
- Rastafari (code 6994)

Changes to the code assignment

The following changes to code assignments have been made:

- No religion, so described, 7101 (previously No Religion, 7010)
- Agnosticism, 7201 (previously 7011)
- Atheism, 7202 (previously 7012)
- Humanism, 7203 (previously 7013)
- Rationalism, 7204 (previously 7014)
- Unitarian Universalism, 7305 (previously Unitarian, 2914)

Religious groups which have been removed from the classification

The following religious groups have been removed from the classification:

- Christian Life Churches International (formerly coded to 2405)
- Faith Churches (formerly coded to 2408)
- Pantheism (formerly coded to 6134)

Changes to the coding index

Changes to the coding index will reflect changes across the classification including appropriate entries for responses previously coded to supplementary codes.

Those groups which have been removed from the classification have been assigned the following codes:

- Christian Life Churches International is coded to Acts 2 Alliance (code 2416; formerly coded to 2405)
- Faith Churches is coded to Christianity, nfd (code 2000; formerly coded to 2408)
- Pantheism is coded to Theism (Code 7304; formerly coded to 6134)

Comparing current and previous editions of the ASCRG

Correspondence tables are available in the ASCRG data cube if users need to convert data from the third edition to second edition Revision 1 of ASCRG.

Generally, the religious groups (base-level units) of both editions of the classification retain a one-to-one relationship. The correspondence table itemises the code linkages between the religions, details the links between the broad groups and the narrow groups, and indicates movements within the structure of particular religious groups. In some instances, there is not a direct relationship between the religions or religion groupings of the structures of the two editions. Partial linkages within the structure are indicated by including the word 'part' after the code of the religion or religious group concerned.

Building the classification

Classification structure

The Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) has a three level hierarchical structure that consists of broad groups, narrow groups and religious groups.

Broad group

The broad group level is the highest and most general level of the classification. Seven

broad groups have been formed by aggregating narrow groups, and hence religious groups, which are broadly similar in terms of the classification criteria.

Broad group 7, 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation', comprises entities which are identifiable and useful groupings which, while not satisfying the criteria of a religion, are necessary to enable the capture of the full range of responses to questions on religious affiliation.

Narrow group

The narrow group level is the middle level of the classification and comprises 34 narrow groups that comprise religious groups which are similar in terms of the classification criteria.

Religious group

The third and most detailed level of the classification consists of base units known as religious groups. The classification consists of 131 religious groups. Some religious groups are residual categories, or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

Hierarchical level	Example	Religion
Broad group	6	Other Religions
Narrow group	611	Japanese Religions
Religious group	6111	Shinto

Classification criteria and their application

The classification criteria are the principles by which the base level units of the classification are formed into classification categories which may be aggregated to form broader or higher-level categories in the classification structure.

Three classification criteria are used in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) to form the various levels of categories of the classification:

- similar religious beliefs;
- similar religious practices; and/or
- cultural heritage.

Religious groups, the most detailed level of the classification, are combined to form narrow groups (the middle level of the classification) on the basis of their similarity in terms of these criteria. Although the religious groups are not necessarily identical in any particular characteristics, the narrow groups formed are relatively homogeneous in terms of the set of classification criteria.

The most general level of the classification, the broad groups, were developed in a slightly different manner. On the basis of the number of affiliated persons worldwide, the major world religions are generally accepted as: Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Tao, Confucian, Tribal, Animist, and Jewish. It would seem appropriate to make these major religions, the broad groups in the classification, particularly as they are generally homogeneous in terms of the classification criteria (beliefs, practices, and cultural heritage). However, consideration of the number of adherents of each of these religions (in Australia) indicates that it is unacceptable in terms of the statistical balance of the classification to include Tao, Confucian, Tribal and Animist religions as broad groups.

Thus, on the basis of a broad application of all the classification criteria, supported by the size of the religions in Australia, the first five broad groups within the classification are:

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism

This application of the criteria enables the delineation of appropriate narrow groups (constructed on the basis of a more rigorous application of the criteria) as subsets (sub-categories) of these broad groups.

Additional broad groups

There are two additional broad groups:

- Other Religions: the classification criteria are applied so that other major world religions and residual narrow groups form a meaningful and useful classification structure within a residual broad group, 'Other Religions'.
- 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation': a further broad group (originally designated 'No Religion') has been included in the classification for practical reasons and to make the classification more useful. The 2016 review of the classification has expanded this broad group to enable better collection and dissemination of the data. However, as this group consists of entities not considered to be religious groups, its development differs from the classification criteria specified above.

Design constraints

The theoretical and conceptual considerations for developing the classification were tempered by other considerations including:

- the practical usefulness of the classification for collecting data from both statistical and administrative collections,
- the analytical usefulness of data collected within the framework of the classification, and
- the number of Australians affiliated to each category at each level of the classification.

Generally, the classification criteria were applied in a straightforward manner. However, some decisions in regard to the identification of religious groups and the progressive grouping of units were made on the basis of whether it would be possible to collect data in relation to certain religious sub-sets or whether data for particular religions would be more useful if classified in a broader or finer manner. These decisions were made in consultation with religious and ethnic communities, religious experts and users of religion data.

The effect of these constraints on the classification has been that:

- some religious groups which are significant in a world context are not separately identified in the structure
- some broad groups are limited in the number of narrow groups they subsume
- some major world religions are represented at levels below the broad group level.

The most notable effect has been in the large number of narrow groups and religious groups represented as subsets of the broad group Christianity.

About codes

Code scheme

In the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) a one-digit code is assigned to each broad group in the classification. A two or three-digit code is assigned to each narrow group, and a four-digit code is assigned to each religious group.

The ASCRG code scheme has been devised so that any future changes to the classification structure can be easily accommodated. For example, when a religious group is added to ASCRG it is allocated a previously unused code, and when a religious group is deleted its code is retired and not used again.

Broad group level

The first level of the classification, the broad group level, comprises seven categories and provides a broad overall picture of the religious affiliation of the Australian population. The broad groups covering the major religions are arranged alphabetically, and are represented by one-digit codes.

They are:

Broad group

- 1 Buddhism
- 2 Christianity
- 3 Hinduism
- 4 Islam
- 5 Judaism
- 6 Other Religions
- 7 Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation

Narrow group level

Several narrow groups are represented by a three-digit code, the first digit indicating the broad group to which they belong. For example, within the Christianity broad group (code 2), Anglican is code 201, Baptist is code 203, and Brethren is code 205.

Religious group level

At the third and most detailed level, religious groups are represented by a four-digit code. The first three digits represent the broad and narrow groups to which they belong.

For example:

Religious groups 2012 Anglican Church of Australia, and 2013 Anglican Catholic Church, both fall within the Anglican narrow group (code 201) and the Christianity broad group (code 2).

Broad group	Narrow group	Religious group
2 Christianity	201 Anglican	2012 Anglican Church of Australia 2013 Anglican Catholic Church 2019 Anglican, nec

Why there are two-digit and three-digit codes in narrow groups?

Narrow groups generally consist of nine or less religious groups and are generally expressed as three-digit codes. However, some exceptions to this coding scheme were necessary to allow for narrow groups which comprise more than nine religious groups to be represented, for example, Pentecostal Religions (code 24), and Other Protestant Religions (code 28).

For example:

The Pentecostal narrow group is represented by code 24, within which 19 religious groups are represented by four-digit codes ranging from 2401 Apostolic Church (Australia), to 2499 Pentecostal, nec.

Broad group	Narrow group	Religious group
2 Christianity	24 Pentecostal	2401 Apostolic Church (Australia) 2402 Australian Christian Churches (Assemblies of God) 2403 Bethesda Ministries International (Bethesda Churches) 2404 C3 Church Global (Christian City Church) 2406 International Network of Churches (Christian Outreach Centres) 2407 CRC International (Christian Revival Crusade) 2411 Foursquare Gospel Church 2412 Full Gospel Churches of Australia (Full Gospel Church) 2413 Revival Centres 2414 Rhema Family Church 2415 United Pentecostal 2416 Acts 2 Alliance 2417 Christian Church in Australia 2418 Pentecostal City Life Church 2421 Revival Fellowship 2422 Victory Life Centre 2423 Victory Worship Centre 2424 Worship Centre Network 2499 Pentecostal, nec

The 2016 review extended the use of two-digit narrow groups to Miscellaneous Religions (code 69) and all the narrow groups in the expanded broad group 7 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation'.

If processing or storage systems require all categories at a particular level of the classification to use the same number of digits, it is recommended the codes of these two-digit narrow groups are backfilled by use of the digit zero e.g. 240 Pentecostal, 280 Other Protestant, 290 Other Christian.

Residual category codes

'Not elsewhere classified' (nec)

Some narrow groups include residual 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) religious group categories. These categories are represented by four-digit codes consisting of the two or three-digits of the narrow group code, followed by the digits 99 or 9. All religious groups which are not separately identified in the classification are notionally included in the nec category of the narrow group to which they relate. The classification currently has 14 nec categories at the religious group level for narrow groups where ABS experience indicates they are required.

'Other' or 'Miscellaneous'

In some broad groups, codes are also reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level. These codes consist of the broad group code followed by 9 or 99. These categories are termed 'Other' or 'Miscellaneous' categories and consist of separately identified religious groups which do not fit into other narrow groups on the basis of the classification criteria.

The classification currently contains three such residual categories.

Additional residual categories

Provision exists in the code structure for the creation of additional residual categories. If experience indicates the need for further residual categories, the ABS will create them and add them to the classification structure. Residual categories are part of the classification structure and should not be created or used merely to 'dump' responses containing insufficient data to code to a separately identified category of the classification.

Supplementary codes

Supplementary codes are used to process inadequately described responses in statistical collections and are listed separately in the ASCRG data cube.

Supplementary codes are not part of the classification structure. Supplementary codes exist for operational reasons only, and no data would be coded to them if sufficiently detailed responses were obtained in all instances.

The codes are of three types:

- four-digit codes ending with one or more zeros
- four-digit codes commencing with three zeros
- to meet specific needs.

Supplementary codes ending in zero

Codes ending in zero are described as 'not further defined' (nfd) codes and are used to code responses to a question about religious affiliation which cannot be coded to the four-digit (religious group) level of the classification but which can be coded to a higher level of the classification structure.

For example, responses which cannot be identified as relating directly to a particular religious group, but which are known to be within the range of religions relating to a particular narrow group, are coded to that narrow group. Such responses are allocated an nfd code consisting of the two or three-digit code of the narrow group followed by 00 or 0.

Similarly, responses which do not contain sufficient information to be related directly to a particular religious group, or to a narrow group, but which are known to be within the range of religions relating to a particular broad group, are coded to that broad group. Such responses are allocated an nfd code consisting of the one-digit code of the broad group followed by 000. For instance, the response 'Christian' does not contain sufficient information to be related directly to a religious group or a narrow group, but it can be coded to broad group 2 Christianity, which encompasses all Christian religions. It is allocated the

code 2000 Christianity, nfd.

Religion responses which can only be coded at the broad or narrow group levels of the classification can be processed within a collection and coded at the four-digit level using a supplementary code based on the broad or narrow group code.

There are some cases where the classification structure would, in theory, support the creation of a supplementary nfd code not already included in the range of valid supplementary codes. For example, no nfd code has been created for narrow group 207 Catholic. The response 'Catholic' is allocated to the category 2071 Western Catholic.

Supplementary codes starting with zero

Four-digit codes commencing with 000 are supplementary codes included for operational purposes to facilitate the coding of responses which present particular problems in that they cannot be allocated one particular religious group, narrow group or broad group code, for example, inadequately described religious affiliations.

Currently the only supplementary codes, for operational purposes are:

- 0000 Inadequately described (this code replaces former supplementary code 0003 Not Defined)
- 0001 Not stated.

Three supplementary codes have been removed. They are:

- 0002 Religious Belief, nfd
- 0004 New Age, so described
- 0005 Theism.

Analysis of data from the 2005 and 2011 Censuses of Population and Housing, which had been attributed to these supplementary codes, indicated that there was scope to incorporate the data collected in the expansion of broad group 7, which has been renamed 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation'. This change should make the data output more useful.

Supplementary codes for specific needs

In ASCRG 2011 Second Edition Revision 1, a number of supplementary codes were included to meet specific needs. They were:

- 2001 Apostolic Church, so described
- 2002 Church of God, so described
- 2003 Australian Christian Churches, so described

- 2004 New Church Alliance, so described.

An analysis of 2011 Census of Population and Housing data indicated most of the data coded to 2001, 2002 and 2004 could be coded to '2000 Christian, nfd'. Code '2003 Australian Christian Churches, so described' was implemented when there was some uncertainty about the use of this term. Analysis of the 2011 Census of Population and Housing responses indicated that the data should all be coded to the religious group which has formally changed its name from 'Assemblies of God' to 'Australian Christian Churches' (code 2402). Therefore, these codes have been removed from the list of supplementary codes.

Effectively, as a result of the 2016 review analysis, the four supplementary codes for specific needs have been made redundant.

Index for coding responses

Why we use it

Responses provided in statistical and administrative collections do not always precisely reflect classification categories. A coding index is therefore necessary to act as a link between responses and the classification, enabling responses to be assigned accurately and quickly to the appropriate category of the classification.

How it was developed

The Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) coding index has been developed to assist in the implementation and use of the classification and should be used when coding responses to questions relating to religious affiliation and religious denomination. The coding index has been devised by reference to existing literature in the field, consultation with religious experts and ethnic and community groups, and by analysis of existing ABS data. It includes responses obtained in ABS statistical collections. It also contains a comprehensive list of the most probable responses to questions relating to religion and their correct classification codes.

The ASCRG coding index has been updated to reflect the changes made to the classification during the 2016 review. It may be requested by contacting standards@abs.gov.au (<mailto:standards@abs.gov.au>).

Coding rules

In developing the coding index a number of rules were followed in assigning index entries the correct classification code. It is recommended that these rules be adhered to when coding any response that does not appear in the coding index provided. Decisions were

made in regard to index entries on the basis of appropriate research and examination of pertinent reference material.

The coding rules are as follows:

- Responses which relate directly to a religious group category are coded to that religious group. Such instances include responses which are an exact match with the religious group category title, responses which are an exact match with the religious group category title except in terms of alternative spelling, the use of abbreviations, and responses which match the title in terms of the fundamental or basic words of the title and differ only in terms of qualifying or extraneous words.
- Responses which relate directly to a religious group because they describe an entity which is one of a group of religions comprising the religious group, or a subset of the religious group (denomination, administrative or organisational grouping) are coded directly to that religious group.
- Responses which cannot be identified as relating to a separately identified religious group in the classification are assigned a residual category code, or a supplementary code.

Using the classification

Editing specifications

The full range of valid codes, which includes the classification structure and the supplementary codes, should be used in all specifications, including when validating input codes at editing stage, manipulating data, and deriving output items. This ensures responses that are allocated 'not further defined' (nfd) or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) codes, rather than the codes of clearly defined religious groups, are utilised.

All the codes are in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) data cube, accessible from the Data downloads section.

Coding, storage and presentation of data

Regardless of the level of aggregation envisaged for the dissemination of data, wherever possible, data should be captured, classified and stored at the four-digit level of the classification. Collecting and storing data at the four-digit level of the classification allows the greatest flexibility for the output of data, enables more detailed and complex analyses, facilitates comparisons with previous data using related classifications, and preserves information that may prove historically useful.

However, the constraints affecting each statistical collection or other application, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors, may not permit the output of data at the lower levels of the classification. Nevertheless, the use of a standard classification will enhance data comparability even though it may not always be possible to disseminate the data at the most detailed level.

The hierarchical structure of the classification allows users the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits their needs. Data can be presented at broad group, narrow group, or religious group level. If necessary, significant religious groups within a narrow group can be presented separately while the remaining religious groups within the narrow group are aggregated. The same principle can be used to highlight significant narrow groups within a broad group.

Data downloads

A coding index has been removed from the data cube. A coding index may be of use to anyone seeking to code responses to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups and may be requested by contacting standards@abs.gov.au (<mailto:standards@abs.gov.au>). The correspondence tables in the data cube have been updated to include additional and amended partial correspondences, and correct formatting and typographic errors. An 'Explanatory Notes' sheet has been added.

Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG), 2016

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Abbreviations

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History of changes

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Previous catalogue number

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